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NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

THE STRATEGY-RESOURCES MISMATCH: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Introduction

> ***"The United States must either revise substantially upward the resources it plans to devote to defense or must reconsider fundamentally . . . its strategy for employing . . . forces in support of national objectives."***
>
> ***David S. C. Chu*** [1]

Throughout the tenure of the current administration, critics have lamented the multi-billion dollar shortfall in defense resources relative to U.S. military strategy and force structure requirements. During this period, underfunding has plagued the procurement account, where a holiday from major systems acquisitions has created a large recapitalization requirement, as well as the operations and maintenance (O&M) account, depleted by unprecedented troop deployment levels. Critics have estimated that the *Bottom-Up Review 1993* force, and its successor, the *Quadrennial Defense Review 1997* force, have been underfunded by up to $30 billion per year.[2]

This substantial mismatch between strategy and resources has generated a lively political critique of an administration lacking understanding and vision of national security strategy. This paper argues, however, that the administration's approach is merely a continuation of U.S. hegemonic grand strategy dating to the end of World War II, and that the current resource mismatch is nothing new. Furthermore, this paper contends that this strategy will continue to guide U.S. security policy, and – in concert with emerging external and domestic trends – will perpetuate the resource mismatch for the foreseeable future. The paper concludes that this strategy will also result in the frequent and continued use of U.S. military force in limited-objective interventions, and in increasing tensions in U.S. civil-military relations.

The Clinton Mismatch

> ***"American political leaders are requiring the military to contract in both size and budget, contribute to domestic recovery, participate in global stability operations, and retain its capability to produce decisive victory in whatever circumstances they are employed – all at the same time."***
>
> ***Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan and Lt. Col. James M. Dubik*** [3]

The principal factors contributing to the Clinton-era strategy-resources mismatch are the administration's expansive conception of U.S. national security interests, combined with its mandate to balance the Federal budget. The QDR requirement (echoed in the *National Military Strategy 1997*) is composed of three broad and open-ended elements – *shape* the international environment, *respond* to the full spectrum of crises, and *prepare* now for an uncertain future. The related goal of *full spectrum dominance* articulated in *Joint Vision 2010* is likewise a task of boundless proportion.

In spite of the expansive strategy, defense budget levels have declined. Because defense spending accounts for roughly half of all federal discretionary outlays, military reductions have been an essential part of the administration's plan to balance the budget. In constant terms, the current defense budget is down roughly 30 percent from the end of the Cold War, and procurement levels have dropped by 45 percent.[4] Forces have declined from President Bush's base force level by approximately 20 percent in active duty personnel, active duty army combat brigades, naval ships, and tactical air wings.[5]

To help muster the additional resources necessary to afford an expansive strategy in a fiscally constrained environment, the administration has turned to the usual silver bullets: allies, technology, and defense reform. Unfortunately, these factors are not able to square the circle. Allies in Europe and Asia remain critically dependent on U.S. military capabilities, and U.S. officials continue to express deep ambivalence about allies' attempts to assume a larger regional role. Technology is expensive and risky, and

creates vulnerabilities in an environment of asymmetric foes. Initiatives for defense reform, including streamlining procurement practices and right-sizing defense infrastructure, languish in the too-hard pile due to bureaucratic inertia and domestic politics.

Thus, the current strategy is seriously disconnected from the means available. This disconnect is in itself not uncommon, and merely represents the level of risk in the strategy. However, the mismatch becomes significant when the risk grows unacceptably high and the strategy, by failing to link ends and means in a realistic way, is unable to guide priorities and trade-offs to assist in risk-management.

Cold War Roots

> ***"Even if there were no Soviet Union . . . we would face the fact that in a shrinking world . . . the absence of order among nations is becoming less and less tolerable. This fact imposes on us, in our own interests, the responsibility of world leadership. It demands that we make the attempt, and accept the risks inherent in it, to bring about order and justice by means consistent with the principles of freedom and democracy."***
>
> ***NSC-68*** [6]

This paper argues that the current strategy-resources mismatch is merely a continuation of the disconnect that has plagued U.S. defense planning since the end of World War II, and can be traced to four legacies from the Cold War period.

First and by far the most important is the hegemonic strategy adopted by the United States at the end of World War II. America came out of the war economically and militarily preeminent and proceeded to consolidate its unprecedented role of world leadership by constructing what former Secretary of State James Baker has called "a global liberal economic regime."[7]

As recounted in John Gaddis' *Strategies of Containment,* however, the United States did not always choose to devote resources to defense sufficient to support its

superpower military posture. Gaddis describes cycles in which the United States pursued 'asymmetric' containment (e.g., the defense strategies of Eisenhower's New Look and Nixon's détente), when defense resources were deliberately reduced and risks increased even in the face of the monolithic Soviet threat.[8] Cold War security requirements were not fully underwritten even when higher cost, 'symmetric' approaches were adopted (e.g., Kennedy's Flexible Response), however, since the United States relied on its nuclear deterrent to offset sizable adverse imbalances in U.S. conventional force posture.[9]

Extended deterrence is the second feature of U.S. Cold War strategy that contributed to the rise of the mismatch. Initially, U.S. strategy was made affordable due to overwhelming U.S. nuclear predominance, but it became increasingly expensive when the United States began to emphasize conventional forward defense in response to the development of Soviet nuclear forces in the late 1950s.[10]

As the Soviets' nuclear posture continued to grow, so did U.S. forward deployments, and by the mid-1980s there were nearly 450 thousand U.S. troops permanently stationed ashore in Europe and the Pacific. Even this expensive forward-deployed posture, combined with the threat of nuclear response, was not the complete U.S. deterrent. A key part of the U.S. Cold War deterrent was sheer political will and declaratory bravado, another aspect that exceeded tangible budgets and resources.

The third factor helping to spawn the Cold War mismatch between strategy and resources was the unprecedented size of the U.S. peacetime military establishment. Not only the cost, but the influence of this huge establishment – in particular its classic conservative-realist professional ethic – were significant factors contributing to an unaffordable strategy. As summarized by Samuel Huntington in his seminal work *The*

Soldier and the State, two facets of the professional military ethic stand out in this connection, namely the emphasis on the magnitude and immediacy of perceived security threats, and on the ever-present need to enlarge and strengthen military forces.[11] The effect of the military establishment's influence on national strategy, given its ethic and its substantial economic and political footprint in U.S. domestic affairs, naturally inclined the nation toward a budget-busting defense posture.

Furthermore, the very size and capability of the U.S. military contributed to the Cold War mismatch through what Gaddis has called the tyranny of means. For most of this period, and particularly post-Viet Nam, the United States built and maintained a world-class military, trained and equipped with the most advanced technology available, and capable of providing unparalleled power projection. Essentially, the U.S. military was too capable *not to be used* in the pursuit of hegemonic objectives, while at the same time being insufficient to accomplish them fully. Paraphrasing Gaddis, this effect could instead be termed the irony of means.

The fourth factor giving rise to the Cold War mismatch of strategy and resources existed at the level of program budgeting and weapons acquisition. In the pursuit of ever-greater technological advances, and compounded by the inefficiencies of the Pentagon procurement system, defense planners exhibited a systematic bias to overestimate weapons performance and underestimate life cycle costs.[12] This so-called 'discipline gap' in defense planning consistently caused the Department to produce fewer and/or less capable weapons systems than the level for which it was funded. By preventing the fielding of the budgeted force structure, which was already inadequate to implement the hegemonic strategy, dysfunctional planning thereby exacerbated the mismatch.

Future Prospects

> ***"Given the dangers we know, and given the certainty that unknown perils await us over the horizon, there can be no respite from our burden of benevolent, global hegemony."***
>
> ***Robert Kagan and William Kristol*** [13]

This paper contends that, in combination with enduring Cold War trends, additional factors now emerging are likely to perpetuate the strategy-resources mismatch for the foreseeable future.

The legacies described in the previous section are still going strong even a decade after the end of the Cold War. This is because the end of the Cold War had no effect on the cornerstone of U.S. strategy, which remains the maintenance of a liberal world order through the export of American ideals. However, the demise of the Soviet Union has made it even more difficult than it was during the Cold War to allocate the resources required to implement this imperial grand strategy. As for deterrence, post-Cold War strategists have taken this concept to a new level. In *environment shaping*, they have discovered the logical precursor to deterrence by punishment and denial. This approach – call it deterrence by preemption – is proving even more difficult and expensive to implement than its Cold War variants. Lastly, the tyranny/irony of means and dysfunctional planning remain integral parts of the strategy process.

Emerging international and domestic trends will further reinforce the system's tendency to sustain the mismatch. The two most important trends in the international context are the spread of instability and continued globalization, including increasing economic interpenetration and the revolution in information technologies. Together, these developments will heighten the impact that events a world away can have on U.S. interests, and the speed at which they can do so. As Anthony Cordesman has written,

"One awkward corollary of being a global superpower is that anything anywhere in the world involves at least a tenuous tie to some strategic interest."[14]

The end of the Cold War has brought with it the return of history, including crisis and conflict in the non-industrialized world. These regions will experience the vast majority of future global population growth, leading to the migration of large numbers of predominantly young populations to urban areas. There, problems of disease, overcrowding, unemployment, and crime will be exacerbated, overwhelming inefficient governments. Inter-group conflict will breed in abject living conditions, fueled by cheap and ample supplies of conventional weapons, and exploited by desperate, ambitious leaders. These conflicts will spread the specter of failed states, refugees and displaced persons, and human rights abuses.

In addition, serious threats to U.S. vital interests remain, including the proliferation of WMD and missile technology, and the prospect of terrorism and cyberwar. In response to these threats, complex and very expensive programs for missile defense, the militarization of space, and the protection of critical infrastructure will compete for finite defense resources. Also affecting vital U.S. interests are the uncertain futures of the brittle and illegitimate regimes in the friendly Gulf states, possible shifts in the dynamics of power in Asia, and the ever-present question of Russia.

In short, the uncertainty hawks will have plenty to be hawkish about. Not only will managing these risks require substantially more resources than are likely to be available, but in addition such an expansive view of the threat tends to compound itself. As Christopher Layne has observed, "Each time the United States pushes its security interests outward, threats to the new security frontier will be apprehended."[15]

Turning to the domestic context, two key trends likely to sustain the mismatch are demographic shifts and political consensus. Over the next ten years, the share of the U.S. population represented by minorities is estimated to reach 30 percent, from less than 25 percent in 1990 – of which the proportion that is foreign-born or second-generation is forecast to grow from 40 percent to 50 percent during this period.[16] With such a marked change in the share of the U.S. population having external ties, domestic political constituencies may be somewhat more highly attuned to international affairs. Also during this period the graying of America will continue, although its impact will be less evident by 2010 than in the years thereafter.[17] This trend will gradually exacerbate constraints on discretionary outlays, which will in turn intensify pressures on the defense budget.

More importantly, the domestic political consensus looks to remain firmly in favor of a major U.S. role in world affairs. The breadth of this consensus is underscored by the convergence of competing political camps in support of proactive U.S. hegemony. Compare, for example, the views of neo-Reaganites like Kagan and Kristol, who advocate continued U.S. muscular activism in world affairs, and neo-liberals like William Perry and Ashton Carter, who promote an intensified program of engagement and shaping termed 'preventive defense.'[18]

The contrary position, that the United States should share substantial responsibility for maintaining the global liberal economic regime, requires unacceptable constraints on U.S. freedom of action and is sharply out-of-step with the goal of the political mainstream, which is to sustain the U.S. role as world leader. The United States simply cannot maintain its empire from the sidelines or by proxy. As Andrew Bacevich

has written, "Any suggestion that the United States is not measuring up to its obligation to enforce the rules might call into question its claim to be the hub from which the spokes of the international system extend."[19]

Conclusion

> ***". . . it is past time to develop a new American way of war, free from insistence on total force and unlimited victory."***
>
> ***Russell F. Weigley*** [20]

I personally believe there is merit in the views of scholars such as Richard Haass and Christopher Layne, who argue that the return to a multipolar international order is inevitable, and that the United States should start positioning its strategy to take advantage of this eventuality.[21] However, this paper has argued that over the near- to mid-term U.S. strategic thinking is not likely to kick the hegemonic habit, nor its corollary, the resource mismatch. In closing, the paper takes a brief look at implications for the use of force and civil-military relations.

The unavoidable consequence of sustained U.S. hegemony, particularly given the crisis-rich security environment postulated here, is a continuation of the recent pattern of frequent and prolonged U.S. military interventions, often for limited objectives. Deterrence will be less efficacious due to the nature of intra-state conflict, and the diverse and unpredictable array of nonstate-sponsored threats. Moreover, as Barry Blechman and Tamara Cofman Wittes have observed, inconstancy of U.S. policy in the past has weakened deterrence, and "made it extremely difficult for the United States to achieve its objectives without actually conducting military operations."[22]

Unfortunately, interventions for limited objectives go against the grain of the American way of war – the term used by Russell Weigley to refer to strategies of annihilation in support of unlimited war aims, and adopted by others to characterize

conflicts featuring military absolutism and autonomy in which overwhelming force is used to defeat a clearly-defined enemy and accomplish unambiguous objectives.[23] The restriction of military absolutism and autonomy in future conflicts is likely to result in heightened tensions between civilian and military leadership in planning and executing these interventions. These tensions will increase as political overseers persist in asking the military to do more than it can afford, in missions at odds with its professional ethic, without sufficient help from domestic agencies in tasks that are properly theirs, and with its operational and tactical decisions subject to close civilian oversight.[24]

Relations will be further soured and frustrations will mount due to continued in-fighting among the services for scarce resources to meet expanding missions, and their difficulty in obtaining increased funding absent a 'classic' enemy. As Andrew Bacevich has observed, "In a world without great power adversaries, mere 'defense' provides a flimsy justification for maintaining a military establishment with global reach and a global presence."[25] Thus over the coming years will the mismatch endure.

Notes

[1] David S. C. Chu, "What Can Likely Defense Budgets Sustain?" in Zalmay M. Khalilzad and David A. Ochmanek, eds., *Strategy and Defense Planning for the 21st Century* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1997), p. 270.

[2] Don M. Snider and Andrew J. Kelly, "The Clinton Defense Program: Causes for Concern" in Stephen J. Cimbala, ed., *Clinton and Post-Cold War Defense* (Westport, CN: Praeger Press, 1996), pp. 8-10; John Hillen, "Defense's Death Spiral," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 1999, p. 6; Sheila Foote, "Service Chiefs Detail Unfunded Requirements," *Defense Daily*, October 22, 1999, p. 1.

[3] Quoted in Sam C. Sarkesian, "Introduction," Sam C. Sarkesian and Robert E. Connor, Jr., eds., *America's Armed Forces: A Handbook of Current and Future Capabilities* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 27. Emphasis in original.

[4] William S. Cohen, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1999), p. B-1.

[5] *Ibid*., p. D-2; Council on Foreign Relations, *Future Visions for U.S. Defense Policy: Four Alternatives Presented as Presidential Speeches* (New York: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), p. 5.

[6] NSC-68, April 7, 1950, Sections IV.B.3 and VII.A. Cited in S. Nelson Drew, ed., *NSC-68: Forging the Strategy of Containment* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1994), pp. 42, 66.

[7] Quoted in Benjamin Schwarz, "Why America Thinks It Has to Run the World," *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1996, p. 93. This theme is also developed in G. John Ikenberry, "America's Liberal Hegemony," *Current History*, January, 1999, pp. 23-28.

[8] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 352-357.

[9] *Ibid*.; Paul K. Davis, "Planning Under Uncertainty Then and Now: Paradigms Lost and Paradigms Emerging" in Paul K. Davis, ed., *New Challenges for Defense Planning: Rethinking How Much is Enough* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1994), p. 17.

[10] Samuel P. Huntington, "Conventional Deterrence and Conventional Retaliation in Europe" in Keith A. Dunn and William O. Staudenmaier, eds., *Military Strategy in Transition: Deterrence and Defense in the 1980s* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), pp. 15-41.

[11] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), chapter 3.

[12] Kevin N. Lewis, "The Discipline Gap and Other Reasons for Humility and Realism in Defense Planning" in Paul K. Davis, ed., *New Challenges for Defense Planning: Rethinking How Much is Enough* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1994), pp. 101-132. See also Franklin C. Spinney, *The Plans/Reality Mismatch and Why We Need Realistic Budgeting* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985).

[13] Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "The Burden of Power is Having to Wield It." *The Washington Post*, March 19, 2000, p. B3.

[14] Anthony Cordesman, *The Lessons and Non-Lessons of the Air and Missile War in Kosovo: Summary Briefing to the USAF/XP Strategy Forum*. (Washington, D.C.: Cordesman, 1999), p. 11.

[15] Christopher Layne, "Rethinking American Grand Strategy: Hegemony or Balance of Power in the Twenty-First Century?" *World Policy Journal*, Summer, 1998, p. 18.

[16] Drawn from data presented in Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey S. Passel, "The Future Immigrant Population of the United States," in Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey S. Passel, eds., *Immigration and Ethnicity: The*

Integration of America's Newest Rivals (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1994), pp. 317-354.

[17] Steve H. Murdock, *An America Challenged: Population Change and the Future of the United States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 34-47.

[18] Kagan and Kristol; Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

[19] Andrew J. Bacevich, "Policing Utopia: The Military Imperatives of Globalization," *The National Interest*, Summer, 1999, p. 11.

[20] Russell F. Weigley, "The Soldier, the Statesman, and the Military Historian," *The Journal of Military History*, October, 1999, p. 818.

[21] Richard Haass, "What To Do with American Primacy," *Foreign Affairs*, September/ October, 1999; Layne.

[22] Barry M. Blechman and Tamara Cofman Wittes, "Defining Moment: The Threat and Use of Force in American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Spring, 1999, p. 5.

[23] Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. xxii. See also Stephen J. Cimbala, "The American Way of War" in Sarkesian and Connor, Jr., 1996, pp. 215-254; and Christopher M. Gacek, *The Logic of Force: The Dilemma of Limited War in American Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[24] Don Snider, "U.S. Civil-Military Relations and Operations Other Than War" in Vincent Davis, ed., *Civil-Military Relations and the Not-Quite Wars of the Present and Future* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1996), pp. 4-5, 11-13.

[25] Bacevich, p. 7.

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